

Fall fun at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

by Nicole Gustine



photo of a fall walk through Keen Eye Nature Trail. USFWS/Nicole Gustine.

"Is it called fall because all the leaves fall to the ground?" asked a kindergartner on a recent Refuge field trip. I told her I thought it was. That same evening at home while sipping a cup of tea, I again wondered about the origin of the word "fall." To satisfy my curiosity, I logged onto my computer to see what I could learn. I discovered that "fall" is derived from the phrase "fall of the leaf" and represents the season when the leaves fall to the ground from the tree. The other term for fall—"autumn"—is derived from the Latin word *autumnus* used to identify the season from the autumn equinox to the winter solstice.

Each fall/autumn when I walk with school groups on the Keen Eye Nature Trail, it is such a joy to see how leaves and berries change color hour by hour from morning to afternoon. In a season where students have colder hands, runnier noses and more layers of clothes, I treasure the sound of their laughter as

they experience the beauty of autumn colors and the fun of rustling through the fallen leaves on the trail.

As the Education Specialist at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge my main goal is to satisfy the curiosity children and adults have about the natural world and to get them outside to experience it. Learning outside evokes a deeper appreciation of the nature's beauty and mystery in all of us!

In that spirit of outdoor discovery, you can join us at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge to celebrate National Wildlife Refuge Week for our special event, Fall Fun Day. The event will be on Saturday, September 30 from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Refuge Visitor Center and Environmental Education Center on Ski Hill Road in Soldotna. Come join us for the family activities, tasty snacks, hot drinks, and door prizes. Special guided nature walks are scheduled at 11:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and 1:30 p.m. These delightful walks last 30 minutes and cover $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile round trip. Please call 262-7021 to pre-register for walks as space is limited.

Almost a year has past since the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Environmental Education Center was dedicated. In that time, the center has become a wonderful addition to Refuge facilities and is used for special events, school field trips, summer Junior Explorer Programs, Hunter Safety Education courses, and as a home school Discovery Room. Our first Discovery Room, "Warming Up to winter," took place this past February. If you are a home school parent or know someone who is, mark your calendar for our "Spooky Season" Discovery Room held from October 25-27, 2006.

We look forward to you and your family joining us for autumn events including Fall Fun Day on September 30 and "Spooky Season" home school Discovery Room from October 25-27. Even if you miss these fun times, you can hike the Keen Eye Nature Trail on your own and enjoy watching those colorful leaves fall to the ground!

Nicole Gustine has worked as an Education Specialist at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge for five years developing and expanding its environmental education programs. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.